

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 13766 01 OF 03 101711Z  
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
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-----101737Z 118198 /44

R 101712Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2656  
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX  
AMCONSUL LYON  
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE  
AMCONSUL NICE  
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 13766

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR  
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S 'EXPRESS'  
INTERVIEW

REF: PARIS 12700

SUMMARY. IN THE MAY 9 EDITION OF "L'EXPRESS", A PRO  
GISCARDIAN NEWSWEEKLY, PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING  
MAKES SOME OF THE MOST REVEALING AND HARD-NOSED COMMENTS  
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HIS SEVEN-YEAR TERM IN MAY 1974.  
REBUTTING DETRACTIONS WHO ACCUSE HIM OF WEAKNESS, GIS-  
CARD HITS THE RPR (GAULLIST) PARTY HARD BOTHAAS THE  
PERPETRATORS OF A DESIGN TO DISCREDIT HIM AND AS THE  
MAIN TROUBLEMAKERS IN THE MAJORITY. HE EXPLICITLY WARNS  
THE RPR THAT ITS BEST INTERESTS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
LIE IN VOTING FOR GOF MEASURES. AT VARIANCE WITH RPR  
PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC OVER WHO SHOULD LEAD THE  
MAJORITY INTO THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, GISCARD  
DECLARES THAT PRIME MINISTER BARRE WILL BE THE UNDIS-  
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PAGE 02 PARIS 13766 01 OF 03 101711Z

PUTED LEADER. THE PRESIDENT'S INTERVIEW COMES IN THE  
MIDST OF A SERIES OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND MEETINGS  
ON THE PART OF GISCARD HIMSELF, CHIRAC AND BARRE, EACH  
TRYING TO EXPLAIN HIS OWN REASON FOR ORGANIZING THE  
MAJORITY. PART OF THE FORCE OF GISCARD'S INTERVIEW  
LIES IN THE UNIQUENESS OF ITS BEING SO FRANK; BUT IT  
WILL CONTRIBUTE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO EASING TENSION IN

THE MAJORITY, AND MAY EVEN HAVE A HARMFUL EFFECT. MEANWHILE CHIRAC PURSUES HIS GOAL OF ASSUMING MAJORITY LEADERSHIP FOR THE ELECTIONS AND THE PRIME MINISTER PREPARES FOR HIS TELEVISED DEBATE WITH MITTERRAND ON MAY 12. END SUMMARY.

1. A CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW OF EVENTS SINCE NOON MAY 6 REVEALS AN EFFORT ON THE PART OF GISCARD AND CHIRAC EACH TO HAVE THE LAST WORD. ON THAT DAY CHIRAC LUNCHEDED WITH BARRE, DECLARED HIMSELF AFTERWARDS SATISFIED WITH THE MEETING, AND PROMISED THAT A MAJORITY PACT WOULD BE ATTEMPTED. THE SAME NIGHT, IN HIS FIRST LARGE PUBLIC MEETING SINCE HIS ELECTION AS MAYOR OF PARIS, CHIRAC, IN AN ECSTASY OF GALLIC HYPERBOLE, DECLARED TO THE CROWD THAT, "WITH AN AUTHORITY THAT COMES NOT FROM MYSELF, BUT -- AND THIS YOU SENSE -- FROM A NATIONAL INSTINCT, I HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK FROM YOU A CIVIL EFFORT PROPORTIONATE TO THE DANGERS AT HAND." ONCE AGAIN, IN A RADIO INTERVIEW THE FOLLOWING DAY, CHIRAC, BASING HIMSELF IN WHAT HE SEES AS GISCARD'S GREEN LIGHT IN HIS APRIL 29 SPEECH (PARIS 12943), REAFFIRMED HIS DETERMINATION TO LEAD THE MAJORITY INTO BATTLE. INTERESTINGLY HE FOUND IT JUST AND NORMAL THAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD WISH TO REMAIN TO THE END OF HIS TERM DESPITE AN EVENTUAL VICTORY OF THE LEFT. THEN VGE'S INTERVIEW APPEARED IN MONDAY MORNING'S "L'EXPRESS".

2. IN THE CONFIDENCE DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT A WEEK EARLIER, MICHEL DEBRE THUNDERED AGAINST GOF FOR ITS REFUSAL TO REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 13766 01 OF 03 101711Z

SAL TO "MAKE POLITICS". IN EFFECT THE PRESIDENT HAS RESPONDED TO HIS CALL. HE BEGAN BY REMINDING HIS READERS OF FOUR FACTORS THAT EXISTED PRIOR TO HIS ELECTION:

- A FRENCH ELECTORATE VIRTUALLY SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE.
- A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY THAT DID NOT COINCIDE WITH THE BREAKDOWN OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE.
- AN ECONOMIC CRISIS.
- THE COMMON PROGRAM OF THE UNITED LEFT.

HE CHASTISED THE LEFT FOR ITS NAIVETE IN BELIEVING IT COULD GOVERN WITH ONLY 50 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE BEHIND IT. THEN, IN WHAT SOME OBSERVERS SEE AS A BLUFF, DECLARED THAT HE WOULD HAVE DISSOLVED THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR CALLED FOR A REFERENDUM AT ANY TIME SINCE HIS ELECTION (SHOULD THE OCCASION HAVE PRESENTED ITSELF) IN AN EFFORT TO CREATE A MAJORITY MORE TRULY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH IN AN EFFORT TO REEQUILIBRATE THE MAJORITY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 13766 02 OF 03 101716Z  
ACTION EUR-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
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R 101712Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2657  
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX  
AMCONSUL LYON  
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE  
AMCONSUL NICE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 13766

3. HE SPLIT THE MAJORITY IN TWO: THE IMMOBILE (READ RPR) AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT HIS REFORM POLICY, ADDING THAT THE FLOATING MIDDLE 20 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE (BETWEEN THE HARD 40 PERCENT IN THE MAJORITY AND THE HARD 40 PERCENT IN THE LEFT) IS WHAT MUST BE RECAPTURED. HE CITED LAST SPRING (WHEN THE CAPITAL GAINS TAX LEGISLATION REARED ITS UGLY HEAD) AS THE DATE WHEN BEGAN AN ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM, LEAVING NO DOUBT THAT THE RPR SHOULD TAKE FULL BLAME. ONCE AGAIN HE REFERRED TO HIS DETERMINATION TO HAVE DISSOLVED THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD BARRE NOT HAVE RECEIVED HIS VOTE OF CONFIDENCE ON HIS TWELVE-MONTH PLAN, AND SPECIFICALLY CITED ARTICLE 49 OF THE CONSTITUTION FOR THE FIRST TIME, CALLING IT A RAMPART AGAINST A RETURN TO IVTH REPUBLIC PARTY POLITICS.

4. A THIRD MAJOR THEME OF GISCARD'S INTERVIEW WAS HIS  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 13766 02 OF 03 101716Z

DEFENSE OF HIMSELF. HE CITED A NUMBER OF AREAS IN WHICH HE CLAIMED HIS OWN FIRMNESS HAD RESOLVED POSSIBLE CRISES (CORSICA, UNIVERSITIES, PRISONS, ETC.). HE DECLARED FLATLY THAT THE OBJECT OF THE ATTACKS AGAINST HIM WAS TO SO WEAKEN THE PRESIDENCY THAT GISCARD WOULD HAVE FOUND HIMSELF OBLIGED TO ACCEDE TO POLICIES CHOSEN BY OTHERS, THAT IS TO SAY, THE GAULLISTS. BUT HE WENT ON TO REAFFIRM THAT POLITICIANS BECOME OVERLY SENSITIVE IN ELECTORAL PERIODS AND THAT ONE MUST UNDERSTAND THIS.

5. ANALYZING THE MECHANICS OF FRENCH POLITICS, GISCARD BLAMED THE UNIT VOTING SYSTEM, ANALOGOUS TO THE ONE USED IN THE US, AS RESPONSIBLE FOR PUSHING MANY VOTERS INTO TWO EXTREME CAMPS. CALLING SUCH A SPLIT HIS "FUNDAMENTAL THEME", HE SAID THAT WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE SPLIT IN FRANCE FROM THAT OF CERTAIN OTHER WESTERN DEMOCRACIES IS THE EXISTENCE OF THESE VERY EXTREMES. HE CONFIRMED RUMORS OF THE LAST TWO MONTHS, INDIRECTLY COMING OUT IN FAVOR OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION BY ASKING FOR A REVIEW AT AN UNSPECIFIED TIME OF UNIT SYSTEM. HE LAMBASTED THE COMMON PROGRAM AS INAPPLICABLE AND WONDERED RHETORICALLY HOW MANY LEFT VOTERS HAD ACTUALLY READ IT. IN HIS CONCLUSION HE REMAINED CURIOUSLY AMBIGUOUS ON HIS DETERMINATION TO CONSTRUCT A LIBERAL ADVANCED SOCIETY, BUT SWORE TO "LEAD FRENCH POLITICS" IN THE FULLEST, AND NOBLEST SENSE OF THE TERM.

6. COMMENT: GISCARD'S INTERVIEW APPEARS TO HAVE CAUGHT POLITICIANS AND COMMENTATORS ALIKE OFF GUARD. WHAT HE HAS DONE, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, IS CLEAR THE AIR. BECAUSE OF HIS ATTACK ON CHIRAC'S RASSEMBLEMENT, WE CAN LIKELY EXPECT RIPOSTES IN A NUMBER OF FORMS. WHETHER OR NOT ONE OF THESE FORMS WILL BE AN ASSEMBLY CRISIS SIMILAR TO THAT OF TWO WEEKS AGO REMAINS TO BE SEEN. DEBATE ON THE BUSINESS TAX LAW OPENS TODAY, AND IT PROMISES TO BE TROUBLESOME. FURTHERMORE, GISCARD'S UNEQUIVOCAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 13766 02 OF 03 101716Z

CAL MENTION OF ARTICLE 49, WHICH EMBASSY PREVIOUSLY SINGLED OUT AS A TRUMP CARD FOR HIM, PUTS THE GAULLISTS THEMSELVES IN THE AWKWARD POSITION OF HAVING TO ENGINEER THE DOWNFALL OF GOF THEMSELVS. IN THIS CONNECTION IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECALL THE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE RPR ITSELF. ROUGHLY TWO-THIRDS OF RPR DEPUTIES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (TOTAL -- 174) REPRESENT RURAL AREAS WHERE THE OFFICE PRESIDENCY IS STILL ESTEEMED. THOUGH HOTHEADS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT HOLD SWAY OVER THIS FACTION, THE

"DEPUTES DE BASE" AS THEY ARE CALLED WILL PUT UP A HARD FIGHT WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY GROUP BEFORE TAKING THE DRASTIC STEP OF BRINGING DOWN GOF, A STEP THAT WOULD BE LITTLE UNDERSTOOD BY THEIR CONSTITUENTS. (NOTE: CHIRAC IS BELIEVED NOT TO WANT EARLY ELECTIONS AT THIS TIME.)

7. GISCARD'S INTERVIEW IS ESPECIALLY SURPRISING FROM A PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW. MANY PEOPLE FOR A LONG TIME HAVE BEEN MORE OR LESS AWARE OF THE SENTIMENTS HE EXPRESSED, BUT THEY HAVE NOW BEEN MADE AVAILABLE TO THE MAN IN THE STREET. IN EFFECT HE HAS BACKED CHIRAC INTO A WALL. THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER, NOT A MAN TO ACCEPT SUCH A POSITION, WILL REACT. THE QUESTION IS HOW FORCEFULLY. THE PRESIDENT IS TREADING ON SHAKY GROUND WHEN HE TALKS OF CORSICA (THE VERY DAY HIS INTERVIEW APPEARED AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE ON THE PART OF CORSICAN AUTONOMISTS TO BLOW UP A CLUB MEDITERRANEE INSTALLATION), OR TREATS PARLIAMENTARIANS LIKE EMOTIONAL KIDS. NONETHELESS THE PRESIDENT HAS LAID HIS CARDS ON THE TABLE AND MAY HAVE SUCCEEDED ONCE AGAIN, ALBEIT TEMPORARILY, IN RECOUPING A BIT OF HIS LOST PRESTIGE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 13766 03 OF 03 101721Z  
ACTION EUR-12

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R 101712Z MAY 77  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 13766

8. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE VGE'S EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO CALL EARLY ELECTIONS IS A BLUFF CALCULATED TO SCARE THE RPR, BUT TWO FACTORS WORK AGAINST THAT THEORY:

- THE RPR HAS DECLARED ITSELF READY FOR ELECTIONS (THOUGH PERHAPS MORE TIME IS NEEDED).
- THE PRO-GISCARDIAN ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE EMPHATICALLY NOT READY, AND WOULD SUFFER SEVERELY WERE ELECTIONS TO BE HELD NOW.

THUS ARTICLES SUCH AS THAT IN THE NEW YORK TIMES OF MAY 6, PREDICTING IMMINENT ELECTIONS, SHOULD BE READ WITH CAUTION. THE MONTH OF OCTOBER, WHICH RPR HIERARCHY HAS DECLARED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS HOLDS SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE, OUGHT PROBABLY TO BE VIEWED AS A MORE LIKELY DATE FOR A DISSOLUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY, THOUGH THIS IN ITSELF IS SIGNIFICANT FOR MANY REASONS. IF PM BARRE "WINS" IN HIS FORTHCOMING TELEVISED DEBATE WITH PS  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02     PARIS 13766 03 OF 03 101721Z

LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, HE COULD INCREASE HIS CHANCES OF BECOMING THE DE FACTO LEADER OF THE MAJORITY, AND WILL CONSEQUENTLY PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN ANY FUTURE DECISION TO CALL FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. IN HIS INTERVIEW THE PRESIDENT RECONFIRMED HIS UNQUALIFIED CONFIDENCE IN BARRE. DURING THE NEXT THREE WEEKS CHIRAC IS PLANNING A HALF-DOZEN PUBLIC ADDRESSES, WHICH MAY BE SEEN AS AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERCUT THE PM. CHIRAC AND BARRE WILL BE OBLIGED CONSTANTLY TO UPSTAGE ONE ANOTHER, AND THE EFFECT COULD BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE MAJORITY'S ELECTORAL INTERESTS. SOME OF THE PRESIDENT'S SUPPORTERS WILL FIND IT UNFORTUNATE THAT HE HAS DECIDED TO ESCALATE HIS PERSONAL CONFLICT WITH CHIRAC AT A TIME WHEN REALISM WAS APPARENTLY STARTING TO BRING THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY INTO A MINIMAL POSTURE OF ELECTORAL COHESION. GISCARD'S REFUSAL TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT THE IMPORTANCE OF CHIRAC'S ELECTORAL MISSION IN THE EFFORT TO DEFEAT MITTERRAND MUST BE VIEWED IN TERMS OF THE CONTRADICTIONS INHERENT IN THE CONSTITUTION. AS A FIFTH REPUBLIC PRESIDENT WHO VIEWS THESE PROBLEMS IN PERSPECTIVE, GISCARD FEELS THAT IF HE CONCEDES PART OF HIS AUTHORITY TO SOMEONE LIKE CHIRAC, HE AND HIS PRESIDENCY WILL LOSE ALL CREDIBILITY REGARDLESS OF THE ELECTION RESULTS IN 1978.  
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